

## *Carmine Jewel Notes: Based on observations from 2004 to 2009*

**By Bob Bors**

Released in 1999 but being broadly planted by 2003, this is the main cherry in commercial production on the Prairies. Our first dwarf sour cherry variety, Carmine Jewel, is still very worthwhile having. We were quite surprised when many growers reporting getting 20 or 30 lbs/bush in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year after planting small plug plants. We usually got half that amount on our heavy clay soil at the University. Backyard gardeners have reported up to 75 lbs from one bush, but those are likely very big pampered bushes. Growers have told me, if CJ has an unusually heavy crop it will likely have a lower than average crop the following year. 25 to 30 lbs per bush seems to be average.



**Figure 2. Fully ripe Carmine Jewel.**

Products like pies and jams made from it are considered ‘gourmet’ by those used to traditional ‘Montmorency’ cherries.

The winter of 2008/2009 caused slight damage to our 5 year old CJ trees. (That winter was very bad for other cherries, our Evans was 80% dead.) At bloom time some branches were noticeably late blooming. Sporadic delayed bloom indicates damage occurred in the branches which has partially blocked the flow of sap in the spring. But CJ branches did not die but did carry the fruit anyway. Likely the affected braches may have had smaller fruit and delayed ripening too. CJ was hardier than Romeo and Crimson Passion, but not as hardy as Juliet, Valentine, and Cupid at our location.



**Figure 1. Carmine Jewel has nice flowers!**

Although CJ’s fruit size is smaller and its sugar content is lower than the Romance Series, it has the big advantage of being the first cherry to ripen each season. It is usually the first crop of the season that commands the highest price. This is true for many fruits and vegetables at the farmer’s markets.

A common problem with CJ has been that new growers often pick the fruit weeks before it is ripe. When fully ripe this cherry practically becomes black, yet people have been picking it red! At the red stage, it likely has half the sugar and twice the acidity. Gardeners and growers often get paranoid that their cherries are going to ripen any day and fall off the bush. In reality, CJ and our other cherries will hold onto their fruit the whole season. Cherries will dry like raisins and still hold on. The only time we ever had about 10% of our cherries drop off our bushes was about 7 years ago when a tornado touched down a few km from our fields.

The very dark colour of CJ fruit goes all through the cherry. CJ makes a very dark rich looking juice or wine. When used in dairy products it gives maximum colour for a sour cherry. Only Cupid among our Romance Cherries has a similar intense colour.

Growers have been very happy with CJ. Some have told me they have no desire to plant the Romance series because CJ is good enough.

We had a mechanical harvester (Joanna) harvest CJ nicely. Other grower have had a similar experience with other harvesters. A few growers have mentioned that their harvester is designed for smaller yields and they have to drive the harvester very slowly because there is so much fruit.

The first year CJ blooms there may not be many flowers that set fruit but the following year is usually much higher. Often CJ will have a handful of fruit when in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year, but the next year it may have 20lbs! Several growers have been shocked and have been unprepared for the jump in yield. That 1<sup>st</sup> small yield year is the time to get customers trying the fruit because the next year you will want them buying lots!



Figure 3. Carmine Jewel bushes in their 5th Year with technician Pete Reimer.